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on Tuesday, 16 January 1996, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. CORTI

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 18 OF THE CONVENTION

Combined initial and second periodic reports of Cyprus (CEDAW/C/CYP/1-2) and Supplement to the initial and second periodic reports, 1993-1995

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, Mr. Anastassiades (Cyprus) took a place at the Committee table.

2. Mr. ANASTASSIADES (Cyprus), introducing the combined initial and second periodic reports of Cyprus (CEDAW/C/CYP/1-2), said that the reports covered the period beginning with the independence of Cyprus in 1960, but concentrated on the period since 1985, when Cyprus had ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

3. After achieving independence, Cyprus had initially made remarkable social and economic progress which had, however, ended with the invasion of Cyprus by Turkey in 1974. One third of the island's population had become refugees in their own country. Massive unemployment had had particularly severe consequences for working women. Cyprus had had to undertake social and economic reconstruction, including the rehousing and rehabilitation of refugees and the reactivation of the economy. It had expanded social welfare services for the care of children of working parents, primarily refugees, and for the care of the elderly. Those measures had relieved refugee women of their traditional family responsibilities and had encouraged them to seek employment outside the home. Women had been the first to be hit by unemployment and the last to recover. Both rural and urban refugee women had had to adapt to new occupations, lifestyles and values.

4. However, within a few years, the unemployment of 1974 had been replaced by unprecedented growth and a labour shortage. Since that growth had been primarily in the clothing and footwear industries, which relied heavily on female labour, women, whose economic participation had previously been confined mainly to the agricultural sector, had become an important source of labour.

5. During the same period, women's organizations had been calling attention to the problems faced by women. The first activities related to the Untied Nations Decade for Women had taken place in 1979, when an inter-ministerial committee had been appointed to examine the role of Cypriot women in the workforce, education and law, their social position and the problems of rural women. With the help of foreign technical assistance, research had been carried out on the determinants of female labour force participation and of fertility, the degree of gender segregation in occupations, the earnings gap between male and female workers and the problems of working women. In 1983, the Committee for the United Nations Decade for Women had been established, chaired by the Minister of Justice and with the participation of non-governmental organizations, for the purpose of identifying problems and making recommendations for the improvement of the status of women. Public awareness of the problems of women had increased during the Decade, partly as a result of pressure from women's organizations and

trade unions. Two law reform committees had been established, one to deal with the removal of discrimination against women in family law and the other to safeguard women's rights in the labour market. One result had been the Maternity Protection Law of 1987.

6. In 1985, Cyprus had ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Ratification of the Convention had had a tremendous impact. The political will to promote women's rights had been strengthened, and the country's two most recent development plans included chapters covering all areas of policy on women, in accordance with the requirements of the Convention. The major policy objectives were the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, the transformation of social attitudes relating to gender roles and the promotion of equal participation by women in all walks of life. Ratification of the Convention had also had a positive educational impact on the public, had satisfied a long-standing demand by women's organizations and had stimulated legislative, administrative and other measures on the part of individual ministries.

7. Numerous legal measures had been adopted to enhance the status of women and bring Cypriot legislation into line with the relevant international instrument and with European legislation, especially with regard to family law and labour relations.

8. In 1988, the Permanent Central Agency for Women's Rights had been established as the national machinery for dealing with all matters concerning women. The Agency, composed of representatives of the Government and of women's organizations, had played a significant role in the implementation of the Convention and had organized seminars, meetings and public debates on current issues. In February 1994, a new national machinery for women's rights had replaced the Agency. The new machinery was more flexible and effective, it operated under the auspices and chairmanship of the Minister of Justice and Public Order, with the participation of organizations associated with a broad spectrum of political parties.

9. The Government had made serious efforts to tackle the problem of violence against women and domestic violence. It had enacted a new Law on the Prevention of Violence within the Family and the Protection of Victims of Violence, had worked with women's voluntary organizations to increase sensitivity to the problem on the part of the public and the authorities and had subsidized and supported the activities of non-governmental organizations in that field. The provisions of the Law were detailed in the supplement to the report.

10. Programmes and measures had been put forward to remove obstacles to women's participation in economic life and to assist them in combining family and work responsibilities. The Government had expanded and improved child-care facilities to serve the needs of working parents and had introduced vocational and training programmes for women.

11. The level of education of the general population was quite high, and girls enjoyed opportunities approximately equal to those of boys. Education was considered instrumental in changing social attitudes towards gender roles, and policies in that area included the revision of textbooks and educational

programmes and the holding of seminars on gender equality for teachers and guidance counsellors.

12. Rural women had special problems, although they had benefited from rural development programmes and now had access to basic social services. A programme had been introduced to promote the role of rural women in the agricultural household and in farming and to encourage them to take up income-generating activities.

13. Substantial progress had been achieved in the field of health, and all women had access to public or private health care. The care of women during pregnancy and childbirth had been a priority; as a result, infant mortality had been reduced to very low levels. Policies included the expansion of maternity and child health centres, especially in rural areas, and the wider availability of antenatal testing, information programmes on health hazards faced by women, such as smoking and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS), and programmes for the early detection of breast and uterine cancer.

14. The Constitution had been amended; matters of marriage and divorce were now regulated by the State, rather than by the Church, and jurisdiction over such matters had been transferred from the ecclesiastical courts to special family courts.

15. Although the percentage of women in the work force in Cyprus was currently among the highest in Europe, women had unequal access to the labour market, especially with regard to occupations requiring a high level of education or technical training and offering better working conditions and opportunities for promotion. Traditional perceptions had an adverse effect on women's choices in education and vocational training, and women's participation in political and public life, especially at the decision-making level, was very limited.

16. The basic objectives of the Strategic Development Plan for the period 1994-1998, with regard to women's issues, were to safeguard the equality and equal treatment of men and women, change social attitudes and promote equal participation by women in social, economic and political life. Specific policy measures included strengthening of the national machinery for women's rights; implementation of vocational training programmes; expansion and improvement of child-care infrastructures and facilities; teacher training and the sensitization of pupils on issues of gender equality; promotion of programmes aimed at changing traditional attitudes towards gender roles, particularly in rural areas; reinforcement of the role of women's organizations; enactment of legal and practical measures to deal with the problem of violence against women; consideration of the possibility of creating an equal opportunity commission to deal with cases of discrimination against women; and promotion of the participation of women at all levels of the political and decision-making process.

17. His Government was unable to ensure the enjoyment of the rights recognized in the Convention for inhabitants of the portion of the island occupied by Turkish troops. For the same reason, all information presented in the report concerned only Government-controlled areas. The Government of Cyprus was committed to ensuring that women enjoyed all their human rights and that they

were equal partners in shaping the economic, political, social and cultural development of their country.

18. The CHAIRPERSON said that the conclusion to the report gave reason to hope that the Government of Cyprus would continue to recognize the remaining obstacles to implementation of the Convention and to pursue its efforts to eliminate them. The Committee would like to receive more information on how the Convention had been implemented in practice in Cyprus and hoped that the encouraging economic situation would not have an adverse impact on women, especially women in the labour force, since, despite the high rate of female employment, there was still a wide earnings gap between men and women.

19. Ms. SCHÖPP-SCHILLING noted that although the report was well written and very informative, it had been submitted late. In future, the Government of Cyprus should adhere to the reporting deadlines, specified by the Convention. She welcomed the Government's awareness of the difficulties in overcoming entrenched attitudes. Referring to paragraph 83 of the report, she asked whether a Cypriot woman could invoke articles of the Convention in court in cases where domestic legislation had yet to catch up with the Convention.

Article 2

20. Ms. SCHÖPP-SCHILLING asked for information on the number of staff working in the national machinery for women's rights, its budget and the reasons for removing ministries' equality officers from the central body of the national machinery. She feared that the removal of those officers might sever the national machinery's organic ties to the ministries concerned.

21. The CHAIRPERSON asked what legal authority the national machinery enjoyed.

Article 4

22. Ms. MAKINEN asked whether the Government of Cyprus had any plans to strengthen special legislation and adopt special temporary measures to increase women's participation in politics and, as her own Government had done, to provide special funding for women's political organizations to enable female candidates to run their election campaigns. She also wished to know whether the Government had considered adopting special temporary measures to combat segregation in the labour market.

23. Ms. SCHÖPP-SCHILLING said that the Government of Cyprus should introduce special temporary measures in employment, such as affirmative action plans with goals and timetables, particularly in the civil service to increase the number of women in Government posts. That might induce private industry to follow suit.

Article 5

24. The CHAIRPERSON said that the Committee was interested not only in the Government's de jure policies but also in improving the de facto situation of women. She wished to know what action was being taken by the women's movement

to bring about changes in social and cultural attitudes and what the national machinery was doing to change such attitudes.

25. Ms. BUSTELO GARCIA DEL REAL asked whether the measures taken to combat stereotypes and prejudice, particularly those using the education system, had been approved by the Government and whether they had been accepted by the Ministry of Education and integrated into that Ministry's overall programme. The representative of Cyprus should also indicate whether his Government had given thought to other, equally important, measures that might be included in an across-the-board equal opportunity programme to be adopted by the Government and endorsed by Parliament.

26. Concerning violence against women, she asked how many complaints had been received under the new Law, how many cases had gone to trial, what sentences had been handed down, what types of violence had triggered such complaints, whether there were any centres to take care of the victims of violence, how many such centres existed and how they were organized.

Article 6

27. Ms. BUSTELO GARCIA DEL REAL said that it appeared from paragraph 174 of the report that Cypriot law viewed the abduction of unmarried women under 16 years of age as less serious than that of married women. In general, the report gave the impression that the protection of women and the prevention and prosecution of trafficking in women and minors was less stringent than in other countries. More information was needed on how the existing legislation was being enforced and whether it was proving effective in practice.

Article 8

28. Ms. SCHÖPP-SCHILLING, noting that the number of women in the diplomatic service had increased in recent years, asked whether there were any regulations which allowed women diplomats to remain in the diplomatic service after marriage.

29. Ms. SINEGIORGIS asked what special temporary measures were being taken to remove the obstacles listed in paragraph 223 and how many years it took for a foreign service officer to be appointed to the rank of ambassador.

Article 11

30. Ms. MAKINEN asked how the Government of Cyprus had achieved equal pay for men and women in the public sector and whether it had developed ways and means of evaluating work of equal value. She wondered whether there were any measures to promote the employment of disabled women. Information should be given on who was required to provide child-care facilities and on women working part time.

31. Ms. OUEDRAOGO said that the third sentence of paragraph 264 was contrary to the spirit of the Convention, which held that work was an economic right which allowed women to achieve full personal development. Women should not work only to contribute to the family income. The representative of Cyprus should explain the implications of that particular sentence.

32. Ms. SCHÖPP-SCHILLING said that the reason why a large percentage of Cypriot women were employed appeared to be that Cyprus had been able to build up its footwear and textile industries. She asked whether there was a risk that those industries would become less competitive because of lower wages elsewhere, and whether they were currently competitive because wages in Cyprus were kept artificially low. If there was a danger of a decline in the textile industry, were there government plans to retrain the women concerned?

33. There was very little information in the report about sexual harassment in the workplace, even though there seemed to be a high level of domestic violence against women and stereotyped attitudes towards women persisted. She asked whether any legislation on sexual harassment was in place or in preparation, whether awareness campaigns were being conducted and what the penalties were for sexual harassment in the workplace.

34. On the question of child care, she asked whether the Government gave incentives to industries to assist employees in finding such care and to support off-site child-care centres.

35. The report mentioned that the retirement age for women was to be reduced from 65 to 63; however, the European Union required that the retirement age should be the same for women and men. That fact should be borne in mind by the Government of Cyprus.

36. She was horrified by the definition of "work of equal value" given in paragraph 2 of annex I to section XIII of the report. The philosophy behind the concept of "work of equal value" was that such work might not be similar but was of equal value in the long run. Studies on that issue had been carried out in the Nordic countries and in the United States.

37. She asked whether the Government of Cyprus had ever carried out public awareness campaigns to help trade unions and women in trade unions to obtain more information on the question of equal pay for work of equal value, and whether any help was given to women making complaints about unequal pay.

Article 12

38. Ms. ABAKA said that, according to paragraph 341, health care was provided to all people without any discrimination; however, the indication in paragraph 343 that 60 per cent of pregnant women preferred to be attended by a private obstetrician suggested that there was a qualitative difference between government and private health care. She asked whether there was any form of insurance to help women who could not afford private obstetrical care.

39. Paragraph 343 (e) indicated that contraceptive devices were not provided by the public sector. it appeared that the Government had no clear-cut population policy and that the only work being done in that area was being carried out by non-governmental organizations, even though their activities were supposed to complement those of the Government. She asked what the Government's policy was.

40. The representative of Cyprus had referred to programmes for the early detection of cancer; she asked for information on the most frequent types of cancer and on the commonest causes of maternal and infant mortality.

41. Ms. SHALEV said that it was not clear what the relationship was between public and private health-care systems, what services were included in public health care and whether the specific health needs of women were covered by that sector. It appeared from paragraph 343 (e) that preventive health care for women was not included in public health care. She asked whether there had been any reduction in government spending on health care since the end of the reporting period.

42. She requested statistics on the gender breakdown of persons employed in the health-care professions. It would also be useful to have information about the reporting obligations of health-care professionals with regard to violence against women and children and on the type of care provided to victims of violence, including psychological counselling.

43. On the question of women's special health needs, she asked whether care related to menopause, ageing and osteoporosis was covered under the public health system. She wished to know whether medically assisted reproduction was available and, if so, what the incidence and cost of such services were and whether they were covered under the public health-care system. The indication in paragraph 345 that the legalization of abortion was not considered desirable in Cyprus since it might further affect the already low fertility rate showed that Cyprus had a government policy of increasing fertility, rather than leaving such matters up to the women concerned. The Fourth World Conference on Women had underlined the need to protect the right of women to choose methods of regulating their fertility. She asked what the procedure was for obtaining an abortion on medical grounds, how the costs were covered and whether teenage pregnancy was considered medical grounds for an abortion and, if not, what the rates of teenage pregnancy were and whether they resulted in early marriage. She also asked for statistics on the incidence of legal abortions, with a breakdown of the grounds given for performing them.

44. Paragraph 343 (e) indicated that contraceptive devices were provided by a non-governmental organization at cost price; she asked how that price related to the average income of Cypriot women and whether contraception was really affordable for them. Since abortion was illegal in Cyprus, it was especially important that contraceptive methods should be available and accessible.

45. On the question of the sexual health needs of women, she asked what types of sex education were available, especially for teenage boys and girls, whether teenage girls were able to receive proper counselling on sexual health and contraception and on AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases and whether anything has been done in Cyprus to enhance the capacity of adolescent girls and women to negotiate the terms of sexual intercourse. She requested updated and gender-disaggregated statistics on the incidence of AIDS, and information on whether the incidence of AIDS was related to substance abuse or prostitution, and whether condoms were freely available in Cyprus. She asked how many women were members of the National AIDS Committee. She requested gender-disaggregated data on women's and men's health, showing the causes of death and disease,

levels of substance abuse, and the incidence of sexually transmitted diseases, occupational health problems and mental illness.

Article 14

46. Ms. OUEDRAOGO, noting that paragraph 402 indicated that of the total number of loans issued over the past three years, loans to women farmers had accounted for 44.5 per cent, asked whether it was wealthier or poorer women who received such loans and what proportion of the original requests for loans had actually been granted. She also asked whether the Government of Cyprus planned to establish a special bank for women, and what was being done to ensure that the proportion of loans granted to women farmers would be maintained.

47. Ms. SCHÖPP-SCHILLING requested more information on everyday life in rural areas; she asked what kind of work was carried out by women and what they produced, whether they lived on very small farms and whether such farms were being threatened by larger farms and by agribusiness. On the question of social security, she asked what the Government's current position was and whether any new legislation was being prepared. Was the Government considering the possibility of subsidizing the pension contributions of rural women, and were such women free to make payments themselves? She asked whether young women were still interested in doing agricultural work even though no individual pensions were available; if Cyprus became a member of the European Union, the Government would have to face that issue, as well as the issue of social security for housewives.

Article 16

48. Ms. ESTRADA CASTILLO said that the reform and modernization of the Family Law was a welcome development, but that the Law by itself could not solve social problems, especially if they were deeply rooted in tradition and religious practice. She asked whether the Government of Cyprus had undertaken a publicity campaign about Law No. 95/89, whether budgetary provision had been made for the new family courts, and whether family court judges and officials had received training in gender-related issues. Paragraph 478 (e) indicated that the court could judge that maintenance should be awarded to a divorced spouse for reasons of clemency; however, maintenance should be a right, not an act of clemency. She asked what was meant by that provision.

49. Paragraph 472 indicated that no legal provisions existed covering the status of unmarried couples; she asked what happened when a common law relationship ended, whether children born of such relationships were entitled to support and were protected by the State, and whether women in such relationships faced discrimination in society.

50. Ms. CARTWRIGHT asked why the Government of Cyprus had felt it necessary to establish special family courts for certain religious groups; experience had shown that when the law was administered by such courts, it tended to be discriminatory towards women.

51. She agreed that gender-sensitive training programmes should be provided for family court judges and felt that such programmes should be extended to all

judges so that they would appreciate the special needs and concerns of women. She asked whether there had been any increase in the number of female judges since the report had been prepared, and what proportion of family court judges were women. She also asked whether the grounds for civil divorce applied equally to men and women.

52. On the question of women's right to own property, she recalled that General Recommendation No. 21 referred to women's right to inherit land and matrimonial property after the breakdown of marriage. Given the number of legal impediments to the ownership of property by Cypriot women, she asked whether Cypriot women had an equal right to inherit and whether they had any means of redress if they were treated unfairly in such cases. Paragraph 476 indicated that the division of matrimonial property was based on the spouses' contributions to the increase in property; she asked whether the Government of Cyprus had introduced the principle that women were entitled as of right to 50 per cent of marital property, or to more if they had child-rearing responsibilities.

53. Ms. SHALEV, referring to paragraph 462, asked what was meant by "nubile age" in relation to freedom to marry, what the actual situation was with regard to marriages among minors, and whether there were any plans to change that situation.

54. Ms. AOUIJ asked whether the ecclesiastical courts had been abolished and, if not, whether Cypriot nationals could choose between them and the new family courts and whether the ecclesiastical courts were still competent in areas other than family law.

55. She asked how Law No. 95/89 had affected the situation of women and the family and whether the increase in the divorce rate had been a direct consequence of that Law. In order to implement the Law, legal education for women was very important, as was training for judges, especially male judges. She asked what non-governmental organizations were doing to make the transition to the new system easier.

56. She asked whether women had the same rights as men to adopt children, whether illegitimate children had the same rights and privileges as other children, and how many illegitimate children there were in Cyprus. She wished to know whether there were any restrictions on the right to inherit and, if so, what they were.

57. Ms. ABAKA said that training on Law No. 95/89 should not be limited to judges but should extend to the entire law enforcement apparatus.

58. The CHAIRPERSON invited members of the Committee to make any general comments they might have on the report.

59. Ms. BERNARD congratulated the representative of Cyprus on the comprehensiveness of his country's report. Noting that the statistics provided in the report showed that very few posts in the public administration and in the judiciary were occupied by women, she said that much remained to be done to ensure equal employment opportunities in those spheres. She wondered whether

any programme existed to encourage women to apply for such posts or whether the Government intended to introduce such a programme in future.

60. Mr. ANASTASSIADES (Cyprus) thanked members of the Committee for their patience and expressed regret that it had not been possible to provide copies of the Supplement to the report prior to the meeting.

61. The CHAIRPERSON thanked the representative of Cyprus for his remarks. It was the usual practice of the Committee to establish a cooperative relationship and constructive dialogue with reporting Governments; it was less easy to establish such a relationship when documents were received so late that members had no time to study them before the meeting at which they were discussed. She appealed to all reporting Governments to ensure that the necessary documents were made available in good time.

62. Mr. Anastassiades (Cyprus) withdrew.

REPORT OF THE CHAIRPERSON ON THE ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN BETWEEN THE FOURTEENTH AND THE FIFTEENTH SESSIONS OF THE COMMITTEE AND CONSIDERATION OF THE REPORT OF THE SIXTH MEETING OF PERSONS CHAIRING THE HUMAN RIGHTS TREATY BODIES AND ACTION TAKEN BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY CONCERNING TREATY BODIES (continued)

63. Ms. SCHÖPP-SCHILLING, reporting on the activities of the Human Rights Committee in the past 12 months, said that she had received no official reports or concluding comments from the secretariat of that Committee. CEDAW might wish to ask the Division for the Advancement of Women to contact the focal point in the Centre for Human Rights to request that the persons responsible for liaison among the various human rights treaty bodies be provided with the necessary documentation in future. Documents had been requested repeatedly in the past few years, but perhaps a more formal approach would prove successful.

64. She had received a document from the Chairman of the Human Rights Committee informing her, that at its fifty-third session, that Committee had considered initial or periodic reports from Argentina, New Zealand, Paraguay, the United States of America and Yemen and had subsequently adopted comments on each of them. It had also considered a report submitted by Haiti in accordance with a special decision of the Committee.

65. Some officers of the Human Rights Committee had met informally with representatives of a number of States parties which had failed to submit their reports on time, despite having received several reminders from the Committee. That was an approach which CEDAW might consider adopting in cases where States parties failed to submit reports on time.

66. Under its optional protocol procedure, the Human Rights Committee had received a total of 27 communications. She noted that the number of complaints and communications received under that procedure had increased, which suggested that individuals in many parts of the world were better informed of its existence.

67. The Human Rights Committee had considered adopting a general comment on the subject of reservations, but a number of States parties had resisted the idea.

That was a matter of considerable interest to CEDAW, which might also consider adopting a general comment on reservations.

68. Ms. CARTWRIGHT said that CEDAW should follow up on the issue of a general comment on reservations and should perhaps consider placing the matter on the provisional agenda for its sixteenth session.

69. She recalled that at the time of submission of its most recent report to CEDAW, the United Kingdom Government had not ratified the Convention in respect of Hong Kong. It seemed that no consideration was being given to the rights of the people of that territory; the Committee should follow up on that matter at some future point.

70. Ms. ESTRADA CASTILLO informed the Committee that she had received no information or response from the Special Rapporteur on violence against women. She had, however, learnt through unofficial channels that the Government of Ecuador had adopted a new law on violence against women and was preparing to sign an agreement with the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Secretary-General of the Organization of American States on the launching of a regional programme for education on violence against women. The programme was due to begin in February 1996.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.